

*The Future Is Signal*

# ARMY COMMUNICATOR

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## **On the Cover**

*Signal Towers was built in 1968 and served as the iconic Fort Gordon and U.S. Army Signal Regiment landmark for decades. Demolition on the structure will occur in phases over a span of several months and will be replaced with a new modernized facility. The demolition is part of the installation’s transformation and marks another step towards the arrival of what will be known as the Fort Gordon Cyber Campus. (Photo courtesy of Cyber Center of Excellence Public Affairs Office)*

## Team Signal,

Few things in life are more inevitable than change. The Army is a prime example. It is constantly adapting and responding to the changing environment. Our branch, playing a pivotal role in what the Army does every day, is no exception. This month, Fort Gordon and the Cyber Center of Excellence celebrated the end of an era and the beginning of another when it hosted a decommissioning ceremony for the Signal Towers.

Cemented in history since the 1970s, our Regiment has looked to Signal Towers as a symbol. If not for its symbolic nature of a tall structure that exists to signal another, it is recognized as the hub of what has been the training and educational campus for thousands of Signal Soldiers.

Fort Gordon's landscape is responding to the changing environment with new infrastructure to support a \$924 million dollar modernized campus that will train and educate our future Signal, Cyber, and Electronic Warfare experts. This is change to be excited about.

As always, thank you for all you have done, continue to do, and will do in the future for the Signal Regiment and for our nation.

## *Pro Patria Vigilans!*



**Col. James Turinetti IV**  
**Signal School Commandant**



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**Chief Warrant Officer 5 Chris Westbrook**  
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# Signal Towers ceremony - a sign of transformation, progress

## *Iconic structure to be demolished*

**Laura Levering**

*U.S. Army Signal School*

After more than half a century of standing as a symbol of the U.S. Army Signal Corps and Fort Gordon, the iconic Signal Towers will be coming down.

Hundreds of Soldiers, Veterans, and civilians alike gathered at the base of Signal Towers for a memorialization ceremony April 22. Built in 1968, the iconic 10-story building was dedicated on Aug. 15, 1970, and remained operational until July 31, 2021, when its doors closed for good in preparation for what will be known as the Fort Gordon Cyber Campus. Adjacent to Signal Towers was Alexander Hall, an 800-seat auditorium, and four nearby academic buildings; all of which will also be demolished.

At its peak, Signal Towers featured a cafeteria, bookstore, bank, barbershop and exercise room on the ground floor. By construction's end, the new cyber campus will feature a walkable, college-like campus with state-of-the-art classrooms, robust communications capabilities, and powerful heating/air conditioning (essential when working with large computer servers and heat-generating equipment). It will include four new buildings and eight modernized facilities at an estimated cost of \$924 million.

Serving as host of the memorialization ceremony, Brig. Gen. Paul T. Stanton, U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence and Fort Gordon commanding general, shared details surrounding one of his first meetings last summer as commanding general. That meeting focused on plans for the new CCoE headquarters and cyber campus, which he described as "a massive and complex undertaking with many dependencies" that left him with a pit in his stomach, he said, as soon as he heard it entailed the demolition of Signal Towers. But as details emerged and plans began unfolding before his eyes, Stanton's perspective changed.



*Col. James Turinetti IV, left, U.S. Army Signal School commandant, and Command Sgt. Maj. Darrien Lawshea, U.S. Army Signal School command sergeant major, prepare to cover a concrete S that was previously atop Signal Towers overlooking Fort Gordon. (Photo by Laura Levering, U.S. Army Signal School)*

"Upon further reflection, I no longer have a pit in my stomach about being the one who will decommission Signal Towers," he said.

More than a mere structure made of bricks, concrete and steel, Stanton said Signal Towers represents so much more. It represents the dedication and service of countless Signal Regiment members and Veterans

with ties to it. It has served as a symbol to the Fort Gordon community, visible for miles. But as time passed and technology evolved, the need for Signal Towers dissipated.

“We still bravely position assets on the battlefield; we just do it in dramatically different ways,” Stanton said. “We still use terrain to our advantage, but rarely will we position ourselves on the highest point where today’s enemies will target us. Rather, we use the terrain with technology to shoot data up the satellites and back down to our command post. We use technology to own the low ground ... to purposely not be seen by the enemy.”

Stanton went on to say that just as the battlefield has evolved, the means in which Soldiers train and are educated must also evolve – starting at Fort Gordon. From 2010-2013, both the Military Intelligence Corps and Signal Corps developed cyberspace-focused military occupational specialties, and in December 2013, it was announced that Fort Gordon was selected to become home to the new U.S. Army Cyber Command (ARCYBER).

The cyber branch was formally established in 2014, and subsequently the U.S. Army Cyber School opened. In 2018, the CCoE integrated electronic warfare professionals, and in September 2020, ARCYBER dedicated its new headquarters in a ceremony – a state-of-the-art 336,000-square-foot facility designed to “better enable the integration of cyber, signal, electronic warfare, intelligence and information operations,” said ARCYBER commander Lt. Gen. Stephen G. Fogarty, during the headquarters’ dedication ceremony.

“This move combined the institutional Army with the operational Army into a single installation such that we now educate, train and equip and fight from one installation – a transformational move that creates great continuity between how we operate and what we teach,” Stanton explained.

Referencing graphics of the future campus and noting the construction going on all around, Stanton said he is excited for the future and gave assurance that Signal Towers will not be forgotten.

“We will memorialize this building and preserve our history, but we’ll bring down this building to make room for what will be the



*Sights and sounds of construction fill the grounds of the future Fort Gordon Cyber Campus. (Photos by Laura Levering, U.S. Army Signal School)*



central courtyard of the future Cyber Center of Excellence Headquarters alongside the Cyber School and the Signal School,” he said. “We no longer need a 10-story building as the highest point on post; we don’t need to see our flags. Rather, we need to operate with purpose – quietly, unobserved, to continue to bring the right information to decision makers at the right time – just as we’ve always done.”

Signal Towers will be demolished in phases over several months. The cyber campus is expected to be complete in 2033.

# Back to School STEM event reaches hundreds of local students

## *‘Engage, motivate, showcase’*

**Capt. Edward Littrell**  
*Augusta Army Recruiting Company*

The Central Savannah River Area (CSRA)/Augusta Army Recruiting Company conducted their first annual Operation Back to School Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) event with five targeted high schools within its area of operation. The initiative was to engage, motivate and showcase Fort Gordon units’ equipment (cyber, signal, and military intelligence) to high school students, teachers and counselors.

The event capitalized on U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command’s initiative to have Centers of Excellence across the Army support U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

Planning for this event started back in early December, which allowed time for units to coordinate with the CSRA/Augusta Recruiting Company in order to support this outstanding event. The event allowed the CSRA/Augusta Recruiting Company the opportunity to show some of the many STEM-related military occupational specialties we have to offer. We had representation and support from 513th Military Intelligence Brigade, 324th Reserve Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 50th Expeditionary Signal Battalion-Enhanced, U.S. Army Cyber School, U.S. Army Signal School and the 369th Signal Battalion throughout the entire event. The supporting NCOs were able to engage with students showing the many capabilities and opportunities the Army has to offer. It allowed Soldiers to tell their Army story to students and answer questions. This event wouldn’t be possible without the supporting units providing equipment and subject matter experts.

**Capt. Edward L. Littrell, signal officer:**

“I have been a signal Soldier/officer for over 20 years, and this is by far the most rewarding job in the Army...giving back to an organization that has given so much to me and my family over the years. Working with the local Fort Gordon leaders, military retiree council and local Association of the United States Army (AUSA) chapter has really paid dividends for our local CSRA/Augusta Army Recruiting Company.



*Sgt. 1st Class Brian Bauchat, U.S. Army Signal School, speaks to a group of students at Lakeside High School in Evans, Georgia, during the Central Savannah River Area/Augusta Army Recruiting Company’s first Operation Back to School STEM event. (Photo by Laura Levering, U.S. Army Signal School)*

It’s about building long lasting relationships with local community partners, schools and different organizations/programs. This event allowed us to leverage Gen. Paul Funk’s strategic message in using Fort Gordon, Georgia, the Cyber Center of Excellence, to support this event. This would not have been possible without the local Army recruiters working with the CCoE and schools to coordinate and execute this event and make it a sustainable yearly event.”

**1st Lt. Ethan Bogle, signal officer:**

“As an enlisted communicator and signal officer, being part of the Recruiting Command Team has been and is one of the most fulfilling opportunities I have done while serving. The Army has done so much for me and my family and being able to give back to the community and affect change in other peoples’ lives. The STEM event allowed Soldiers from Fort Gordon and Fort Bragg to share their Army story and relate to the students by providing insight on future careers.”

# S6 Series: Enhancing armored mobility, speed and lethality

## *Armored unit aims to shoot, move and communicate simultaneously*

**Maj. Todd Klinzing-Donaldson**

*2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division*

*This is the first in a series of online articles written by Army Signal Corps officers.*

As an armored formation, our lethality is not just derived from our firepower but also from our mobility—the speed that we can bring lethality into the fight. During the recent Armored Formation On-The-Move Network Pilot, our commercial network equipment sets enabled us to be both mobile and connected at the same time. We could stay tied to a common operational picture, provide operational input to feed that picture and enable the brigade commander to make informed decisions using near real-time data. Bottom line, it increased our survivability. We did not have to stop to set up at-the-halt systems in a command post configuration to conduct mission command or networked communications. We just did it on-the-move (OTM) from inside our vehicle platforms.

It is no secret, that as an armored formation, we give off a significant physical and electronic signature. Once we get rolling and bring lethality to the front edge, the increased mobility and speed make us a much harder target to fight and defeat. By remaining mobile, we retain tempo, maintain speed and maintain operational audacity. That translates to our unit being a more survivable and lethal fighting formation.

### **Mobility and speed**

During the pilot, when forward, our 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment was able to provide what we refer to as the red picture, the enemy situational tempo, back to the brigade headquarters in near real-time using their intelligence systems while OTM. Previously, working in a brigade operations center, I have often seen a disconnect between timely



*Maj. Todd Klinzing-Donaldson, communications and network officer (S6) for the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, briefs senior leaders on the Armored Formation On-The-Move Network Pilot, at Fort Stewart, Georgia, on Feb. 10. (Photo by Amy Walker, PEO C3T Public Affairs)*

intelligence, information collection, and the dissemination and analysis of that information within the brigade. Often once received, information has already gone stale. Currently, brigade commanders can maintain acute awareness of the location of their forces throughout an area of responsibility. However, locating enemy forces can prove more challenging. Understanding the enemy's situational tempo drives decisions. Do we execute operations to plan? Or execute a branch or contingency operation? Are our indirect fires targets still relevant? Or are we wasting rounds and accepting more risk by firing? Do we have to change our task organization to meet the threat in a way that we had not expected?

Timelier reporting and the ability to see a real-time common operating picture informs commanders on these decisions, providing them more decision space and subordinate units with an increased ability to react to those decisions most effectively. With this prototype network kit, the time from identification of intelligence and information to brigade receipt was decreased to minutes. This can make an enormous difference in shaping success during operations.

Another significant advantage was evident during the pilot. The fires warfighting function was always tied into the network while OTM or at a quick halt, which enabled us to execute fire missions in near-real time versus having to stop to establish upper tactical network communications then return to the fight. That is a big deal when it comes to providing indirect fire effects in the close fight and units' ability to expeditiously execute counter-battery fire missions.

To be successful in future multi-domain operations, the Army understands that, both culturally and by doctrine, it will operate in a considerably more decentralized manner. During the pilot, OTM prototype equipment enabled units to operate much more decentralized from higher headquarters and other units, to go further into the fight. It also enabled headquarters elements to operate more dispersed within their own specific formations, both OTM and at-the-quick-halt, while retaining continued connectivity between each other and the brigade.

### **Transport agnostic**

We also saw important benefits from the increased network resiliency created through enhanced signal pathway diversity. With the prototype enhancements, fires and intelligence warfighting functions had multiple avenues of upper tactical Internet pathways from which to fight.

In the fall of 2020, during our last Joint Multinational Readiness Center training rotation in Germany, we were constantly focused on upper tactical internet transport establishment to enable digital communications. If our satellite terminals or other network equipment failed, as the S6, I knew the failure would translate to decreased fire support, knowledge of enemy situational awareness and survivability. We attempted to address this challenge by establishing the digital network

architecture so that it was always on, maintaining the network 213 of 216 hours during the rotation. The challenge was always transport establishment. The OTM pilot helped provide additional solutions to this challenge. Subordinate units had an increased number of digital transport pathways and multiple links to maintain connectivity to the upper tactical internet network, which made a huge difference for our fires and intelligence communities. In addition, every Army unit supporting a mission always has a communication primary, alternate, contingency and emergency (PACE) plan, but usually that requires switch-over, where the operator has to actually move to the next piece of equipment. This pilot equipment not only provided us an upper tactical internet network PACE, but it did so utilizing automatic failover. The operator did not have to do anything to switch from the satellite communications to line-of-sight; it was automatic and the operators were none the wiser. I have never had that option before. It creates depth in our upper tactical internet capability, and that is incredibly important in a contested and congested environment.

### **Soldier-centric designs**

My unit's role in this pilot was threefold: to help inform the Army on future Capability Set 25 network designs, the concept of operations for OTM networked armored formations from division to battalion; and to market research to determine currently available and maturing industry solutions for armored formation network integration. At this early point in the Army's Capability Set 25 design process, we were not assessing commercial systems specifically, but which capabilities have potential and should be pursued for armored formation network modernization. Does the capability meet a current or future operational need against a powerful adversary? That is what we owed back to the Army: our feedback. I was truly grateful for the opportunity for our brigade to learn and provide feedback on the operational importance of OTM communications for armored formations and how it can enable what we do and what we bring to the fight. The reality of warfare is you cannot shoot and move if you cannot communicate, making the importance of the pilot all the more pivotal.

# Armored brigade assesses On-the-Move network prototypes

**1st Lt. Holly Gerber-George**

*3rd Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team*

The Army recently conducted a pilot to evaluate new and emerging commercial network on-the-move technologies integrated onto available surrogate armored vehicle platforms, as well as expeditionary at-the-quick-halt satellite communications.

The pilot effort was conducted to inform the Army's Capability Set 25 network design, the concept of operations for On-The-Move, or OTM, networked armored formations from division to battalion, and market research to determine currently available and maturing industry solutions for armored formation network integration.

The pilot unit – the “Spartan Brigade,” 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 3rd Infantry Division (ID)– used and provided feedback on several commercial prototype equipment sets, as well as operational tactics, techniques and procedures, during the pilot at Fort Stewart, Georgia, from Jan. 24 to Feb. 11.

Of the three battalions in the pilot, 3rd Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment (AR), 2nd ABCT, 3rd ID, was tasked to assess the first of the three equipment sets in the pilot. This equipment enabled upper tactical internet, or TI, mission command while moving in military armored vehicles. This technology empowered us to set up its operation centers faster and with greater ease than our current capabilities allow.

As the 3rd Bn., 67th AR network and communications officer, it was my responsibility to help train Soldiers on the new communications equipment, work with the industry team who integrated the equipment into the platforms, and ensure we conducted all of brigade's thread assessments while ensuring the Army collected the data they needed. My role was often as a liaison who connected the Army project leads, the brigade operations team and my battalion staff. Months of preparation,



*Soldiers assigned to 3rd Bn., 15th Inf. Reg., 2nd ABCT, test, assess and provide feedback on one of the commercial On-The-Move network equipment sets during the Army's Armored Formation OTM Network Pilot at Fort Stewart, Georgia, Feb. 2. (Photo by Capt. Detrick Moore, Mission Network, Project Manager Tactical Network, PEO C3T)*

training and planning came down to eight days in the field at Fort Stewart, validating what this equipment could do for an armored battalion.

For the pilot, 3rd Bn., 67th AR's focus was to assess a battalion line-of-sight, or LOS, mesh and a commercial flat panel satellite terminal link. The battalion participants can confirm the equipment focused on flexible, sustainable and fast communication systems that benefitted the formation from the company to the brigade level.

The satellite communications, or SATCOM, link that we assessed was facilitated through a flat panel mounted on top of our communications vehicle. This SATCOM link enabled upper TI services between our battalion and brigade. With the flat panel, we could successfully use our mission command systems, including Command Post of the Futures (CPOFs), Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data Systems (AFATADs), and Command Post Computing Environment (CPCE), as well as tactical operations center intercommunications voice calls.

Currently, the network and communications command post node (CPN) team has a long setup process to provide services in the field. This setup includes connecting and grounding our Satellite Transport Terminal (STT), configuring our network stacks, connecting a generator and running fiber to our clients.

A benefit of the OTM pilot equipment is that from a cold start, it takes one-third of the time to pull services for clients. OTM equipment does not require an STT, grounding, or generator services, and is easier for Soldiers to operate. With this faster setup time, my network and communications team allowed for our field artillery and maneuver operations Soldiers to begin sending fire missions and reports to brigade faster than ever before. The ease of not needing as much support equipment and having simplified operator tasks freed up our team to focus on the fight at hand.

At one point, while assessing the OTM upper TI connection, operators noticed the SATCOM link was down. Once the unit took a short halt, the SATCOM link reestablished automatically within a few minutes. At a battalion level, 3rd Bn., 67th AR, does not currently require the operation of mission command platforms on the move. However, this mobile equipment now gives the unit the ability to alter how they currently operate to use increased communication speed between the brigade and battalion levels.

The pilot also used a subsidiary ottoman-sized satellite dish that sits on the ground and connects with fiber to the CPN stacks as an alternate SATCOM link from the flat panel. It deploys quickly and can be stationed away from the CPN. This allows the unit to push deep into the wood line for proper cover and concealment. The satellite dish can sit at



*Soldiers test on one of the commercial On-The-Move network equipment sets at Fort Stewart, Georgia, Feb. 2. (Photo by Capt. Detrick Moore, Mission Network, Project Manager Tactical Network, PEO C3T)*

the edge of a clearing, allowing a direct SATCOM link while maintaining low visibility and far distance from the unit. This could be a tactical accessory for a battalion network and communications officer to keep handy.

My battalion's favorite pilot feature was the battalion LOS mesh. The mesh is a reliable communication tool that enables clear voice and data between vehicles. Not only does the mesh work battalion internal, it also allows each node to talk directly to the brigade with voice and data through the SATCOM link. If a node is within the battalion mesh, it can reach the brigade. The LOS mesh facilitates tactical operations center network, or TOC-Net, capabilities. The TOC-Net capabilities were used due to the ability of all nodes having fast and smart-phone level audio connection within the mesh and back to brigade. As long as there is a low electromagnetic signature, the battalion LOS mesh is a communication advantage that greatly benefits an armored unit, such as 3rd Bn., 67th AR.

The Armored Formation On-The-Move Network Pilot provided a glimpse of the future for Army command and control nodes and how the formation is empowered through developing network and communication technology. During the pilot, 3rd Bn., 67th AR experienced faster and simplified communication equipment reaching from company to battalion nodes.

# “Scorpion Brigade” conducts leadership workshop

**Capt. Fernando Ochoa**  
*505th Signal Brigade*

Led by Col. Eric Rahman, 505th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade commander, Soldiers from the 319th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 98th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, and 505th Headquarters and Headquarters Company, traveled to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to conduct the Scorpion Brigade Leader Workshop, March 24-27.

This workshop was intended to provide subordinate commanders and leaders with Rahman’s vision and ways ahead for the 505th TTSB. During the workshop, command staff provided updates on yearly mission requirements, command best practices, maintaining unit readiness, and community outreach programs. Once they arrived, 505th TTSB Soldiers assembled in the 4th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) drill hall.

“This workshop was important because it afforded down trace units with the opportunity to meet and work with the staff of the 505th TTSB,” said Lt. Col. Stephanie Lee, incoming 319th ESB commander. “The best part of this workshop was developing synergy and interaction amongst the staff and leadership teams. Having all of the brigade and battalion leadership understand the commander’s vision will pay dividends as we go forth as a team.”

The workshop provided commanders the education, knowledge and guidance required to train Signaleers within the signal formation. It also provided an opportunity for dialogue between Rahman and his subordinate commanders. This type of workshop is a keystone to develop the next generation of tactically and operationally sound components.

Rahman took an active role as he taught lessons and challenged his down trace commanders to forecast their upcoming annual training exercises and the solutions to any unforeseen difficulties.

Big Army is fielding ESBs with new equipment, and there is still a lot of training to bring them up to standards, training for the future.



*Col. Eric Rahman, 505th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade commander, addresses Soldiers assembled in the 4th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) drill hall who traveled to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for the Scorpion Brigade Leader Workshop. (Photo by Capt. Fernando Ochoa, 505th Signal Brigade )*

“Commanders publish their command philosophy all the time on paper, but this workshop lets the key leaders understand Col. Rahman’s intent,” said Maj. Joseph O’Neill, 505th TTSB NET-OPS OIC. “This workshop also gives us the tools to meet his intent, focusing on leadership development instead of day-to-day tasks.”

The 505th TTSB deploys to conduct mission command and provide network planning and engineering support for assigned units to install, operate, maintain, secure and defend the Department of Defense Information Network, which are communications in support of the Theater Army and United Land Operations.

# Unique signal battalion joins Cyber Protection Brigade

## *A cohesive force*

**William Roche**

*U.S. Army Cyber Command*

Army Cyber Command's one-of-a-kind signal unit joined the ranks of the Army Cyber Protection Brigade when Soldiers of the 60th Offensive Cyberspace Operations Signal Battalion (OCOSB) placed the CPB's shoulder sleeve insignia on their uniforms in a ceremony at Fort Gordon, Georgia, on March 17.

Lt. Col. Kevin J. Weber, commander of the 60th, said the ceremony signifies the unit's first official act under the CPB and taking its network operations and information services skills to the next level.

"The unit will now broaden its strategic responsiveness as it assumes roles and responsibilities under the CPB as well as continuing mission support for Army Cyber Command. The 60th OCOSB will add unique capabilities and expertise to the CPB as it seeks to merge both Signal and Cyber branches into a cohesive force capable of conducting ... operations to enable information advantage for the Army and joint cyber forces."

Army Cyber Command's operations, executed by "very special men and women from across Army Cyber," are "how we take the will of our nation and make it a reality across the globe and across networks," said Col. John F. Popiak, the CPB commander, during the ceremony.

"But none of it would be possible if it weren't for an incredible relationship with the entire U.S. Army Signal Regiment, represented by the 60th Signal Battalion. We rely on signal leaders around the globe every day to enable what we do, and the 60th represents the absolute pinnacle of excellence, providing that kind of support."

The 60th was activated in October 2021 to support and defend infrastructure and networks.



*Army Cyber Protection Brigade Commander Col. John F. Popiak (second from left) places a CPB patch on the uniform of 60th Offensive Cyber Operations Signal Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Kevin J. Weber, while CPB Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin D. Flickinger (right) places a CPB patch on 60th OCOSB Command Sgt. Maj. Tyrone B. Cooper in a ceremony held at Fort Gordon on March 17. (Photo by William Roche, U.S. Army Cyber Command)*

### **About U.S. Army Cyber Command:**

ARCYBER integrates and conducts cyberspace operations, electromagnetic warfare, and information operations, ensuring decision dominance and freedom of action for friendly forces in and through the cyber domain and the information dimension, while denying the same to our adversaries.

# 25th Strategic Signal Battalion concludes Afghanistan mission

## *Soldiers leave their mark in history, look to future*

**Maj. Dustin Fenton and 1st Lt. Ziwei Peng**  
*25th Strategic Signal Battalion*

“First In, Last Out.” The 25th Strategic Signal Battalion (SSB) concluded its 18-year long mission in Afghanistan with the final closure of Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) on August 30, 2021, just hours before the departure of the Joint Tactical Exfil Team. The conclusion of this mission signifies the completion of a year-long effort to close 10 major sites throughout Afghanistan. With the battalion’s headquarters relocated to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the 25th SSB is focusing on future missions in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).

Operations Resolute Support and Freedom’s Sentinel are not the only major conflicts the 25th SSB has supported. The organization was initially constituted as a heavy signal construction battalion during World War II, being one of the few units to experience combat in both the Pacific and European theaters. In 1954, the 25th SSB provided domestic humanitarian aid in response to Hurricane Carol’s impact across the northeastern seaboard. There, the unit’s primary mission was the restoration and reestablishment of the communications infrastructure.

More recently, the 25th SSB supported the XVIII Airborne Corps during Operation Just Cause in Panama. Less than a year later, the 25th SSB recalibrated its efforts toward a focus on the Middle East in preparation of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. Following a brief deactivation, the 25th SSB was reactivated in 2003 at Camp AsSaliyah, Qatar. Since its reactivation, the battalion has been at the forefront of the Signal Corps, providing base strategic communications infrastructure throughout CENTCOM. The 25th SSB has also demonstrated its ability to execute missions outside of its core competencies by operating and maintaining tactical communications assemblages to ensure redundant communications capabilities throughout Afghanistan.

The retrograde and closure of Afghanistan was a massive undertaking. The buildup of nearly two decades of strategic communications infrastructure translated into thousands of devices, hard drives,



*1st Lt. Ziwei Peng, left, and Staff Sgt. Michael Ramirez, of 25th Strategic Signal Battalion, pose for a photograph prior to leaving Afghanistan on Aug. 30, 2021. Peng and Ramirez were among the final 25th SSB service members to depart theater. (Courtesy photo)*

offices, and miles of cable. In all, the 25th SSB retrograded the vast majority of strategic communication network throughout the Combined Joint Operations Area Afghanistan (CJOA-A). Each base closure presented unique challenges ranging from protection and security considerations to supply and logistical concerns. This spurred the need to expeditiously decommission all communications networks and significantly lowered the tolerance of delays. This proved an exceptionally difficult task. The 25th SSB had to systematically conduct base closure activities while concurrently maintaining communications for critical locations and commands. Soldiers were keenly aware of the complexity of the environment. According to Staff Sgt. Michael Ramirez, “very little happened as expected or went as planned. We did have the right people though – which is all we needed.”

The planning considerations during the decommissioning of the strategic communications network included: enabling C2 for security forces, enabling surveillance capabilities, and providing critical support to the medical treatment facility, counter-fire capabilities, logistics, life support, and facilitating air movements. The closure of Bagram was a stunning feat in and of itself. Soldiers of the 25th decommissioned the network in just four days, over two weeks earlier than initially estimated.

In all, a team of just 18 personnel were able to tackle the daunting task of clearing 13 server rooms and over 300 communications closets dispersed across Bagram Airfield. During this time, they redeployed the entire 25th SSB footprint and over 100 contractors out of theater. The 25th SSB would once again demonstrate their resolve and commitment to the mission several weeks later.

In August, the world watched as the Taliban demonstrated their ability to seize terrain and consolidate gains as they continued their rapid advance into Kabul, the last stronghold of the Afghan government. With this as the backdrop, the mission for the final two U.S. bases in Afghanistan expanded from a gradual retrograde, to one of the largest Noncombatant Evacuation Operations in U.S. history.

The Soldiers of 25th SSB rose to the occasion and met the emerging requirements. In all, they provided network extensions to over 3,000 more personnel including the 82nd Airborne Division, 10th Mountain Division, U.S. Air Force 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR), and NATO partners such as Turkey, Great Britain, Australia, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Canada.

The evolving and dynamic threats experienced during the final days in Afghanistan required flexibility and agility to enable operational success. These conditions persisted for two long weeks and into the final few hours of the evacuation effort. The results of the Soldiers and the organizations' efforts were profound. Their dedication to the mission and skillcraft enabled the communications platforms necessary to safely, securely, and successfully airlift over 123,000 evacuees out of Afghanistan. First Lt. Ziwei Peng commented on the significance of this occasion, "I grew up learning about 9/11. Twenty years later, I got to see it through to the end."

With the conclusion of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, the 25th SSB continues to operate in the present while focusing on the future. Currently, the War Lion Battalion continues to conduct its core mission of operating and maintaining network enterprise centers throughout CENTCOM. The battalion has also shown its willingness to assist with humanitarian missions. Several members of the team stepped up to volunteer and

assist evacuees as part of the processing and relocation efforts at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar.

Looking to the future, 25th SSB is actively analyzing the disposition of personnel and equipment across the formation to ensure the unit is postured for future missions. It is also reexamining its current mission to further develop depth, flexibility, and redundancy in preparation of emergent requirements throughout the area of operation. In doing so, 25th SSB is harnessing its greatest resource: the Soldier. It is leveraging the knowledge, skills, and abilities in Soldiers, NCOs, and officers out of Afghanistan to create a shared understanding to overcome the complex problem sets of the region. Their knowledge and experience are invaluable to the future of the Signal Corps and the Army for years to come.



*The sole remaining flag at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, flying at half-staff to pay respects to 13 service members who lost their lives in an attack at the airport on Aug. 26, 2021. (Photo by 1st Lt. Ziwei Peng, 25th Strategic Signal Battalion)*

# Baby Boom - 12 Signal Battalions born in May 1942

## *“Happy 80th Birthday!”*

**Steven J. Rauch**

*Signal Corps Branch Historian*

May 11, 1942, occurred in the midst of the United States efforts to mobilize, train, and equip a large, modern, expeditionary military force. Army organizations sprang into existence overnight, but it would take time to assign, train and equip the Soldiers who would serve those unit colors in theaters throughout the world. In the case of the U.S. Army, the expansion applied to all branches and services, and the Signal Corps was part of that process.

The need for signal capabilities and assets called for new organizations, and so on May 11, 1942, 12 new signal battalions were constituted into the Army of the United States.

They included:

- \* 30th Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 31st Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 32nd Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 33rd Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 34th Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 35th Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 36th Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 37th Signal Battalion (Construction)
- \* 38th Signal Battalion (Construction)

In addition to the nine construction battalions, the following were constituted:

- \* 59th Signal Battalion
- \* 65th Signal Battalion
- \* 67th Signal Battalion



*Distinctive unit insignias from the three signal battalions formed in 1942 that still exist today. From left to right: 30th Sig. Bn., 35th Sig. Bn., and 59th Sig. Bn.*

All of the battalions served throughout various theaters during the war. The theater allocation breakdown was:

### **Europe**

35th Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
36th Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
37th Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
59th Sig. Bn.  
65th Sig. Bn.

### **Europe and Pacific**

32nd Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
33rd Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
34th Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
38th Sig. Bn. (Con.)  
67th Sig. Bn.

### **China-Burma-India**

31st Sig. Bn. (Con.)

### **Italy**

30th Sig. Bn. (Con.)

Today, only three of these battalions are still serving on duty in the U.S. Army active and Reserve components:

- \* 30th Sig. Bn., Wheeler Army Airfield, Hawaii
- \* 35th Sig. Bn., Fort Allen, Puerto Rico
- \* 59th Sig. Bn., Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

On May 11, 2022, be sure to wish them a happy 80th birthday!

# God, family, country: Soldier thankful to serve all

## *Why I Serve*

**Laura Levering**

*U.S. Army Signal School*



*Sgt. 1st Class Virginia Avila has been proudly serving in the Army for the past 10 years. (Photo by Laura Levering, U.S. Army Signal School)*

If someone was to ask Sgt. 1st Class Virginia Avila 10 years ago where she thought she might be today, wearing an Army uniform in Georgia would never have crossed her mind. Then a tragedy struck Avila's family, leaving her in a place of desperation – one that ultimately led her to the Army.

Avila, information technology specialist training development NCOIC for the U.S. Army Signal School Training Education and Development Division, enlisted in the Army in 2012 after spending several years working in retail management. At 28 years old and married with young children, the decision to enlist did not come easy for the Ontario, California, native. But it wound up being one of the best decisions she ever made.

About two years prior, Avila's husband was critically injured while helping a coworker on the side of a road. A car traveling an estimated 70 MPH wrecked, leaving her husband pinned between two cars. Unsure he'd survive at first, Avila was eventually told he may never walk again. In an instant, Avila's husband went from being the family's "breadwinner" to Avila becoming their primary source of income – all while raising a 3-month and 18-month-old.

"I took on extra hours to keep up with the bills, working 70 hours a week, sometime more, just to make ends meet," Avila said, reflecting on life before the Army. The long hours while trying to take care of their family eventually took a toll on Avila.

"My husband jokingly said, 'Well, maybe you should join the military.'"

Assuming she was too old to join, Avila called a Navy recruiter the next day to inquire about age requirements. To her surprise, she had not yet reached the maximum age to join. Meanwhile, Avila's 17-year-old stepson was speaking with an Army recruiter because he was interested in joining the military straight out of high school. Not long after, that recruiter came to their house so that Avila and her husband could sign paperwork granting him permission to enlist. While there, Avila asked the recruiter about prospects of her joining, and she liked what she heard.

"He told me that my family could go with me if I wanted to go active duty, that the Army would provide housing and medical care ... I said, 'Sign me up,' and I made the decision that day," Avila said.

Both Avila and her stepson enlisted as information technology specialists (25B) and attended the same training but six months apart (he went first). And despite entering the same military occupation specialty, both have had different missions and duty stations.

Avila's career highlights include a deployment to Afghanistan, a three-year assignment at the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and a year-long industry training program with Cisco in North Carolina – the latter of which helped pave the path for where she is now.

"My follow-on assignment was to take what I learned there and then implement it here in the (Signal School) through training and development," Avila said.

She does this by developing the coursework and field training exercises for 25B Soldiers going through Advanced Individual Training, Advanced Leaders Course, and Senior Leaders Course.

“I really enjoy that we get to create material that helps the Soldier better learn what they’re going to be doing,” she said. “I find real fulfillment in seeing those products built and then them understanding and building it in more innovative and creative ways because their learning style is a lot different than what it was when I came through.”

Looking forward to the future, Avila said plans to continue making an impact by becoming an information systems technician (255A) warrant officer – and in doing so, be able to serve at minimum 30 years. It’s a far cry from where she was when she began her Army journey. Initially, Avila said she only planned on fulfilling her four-year commitment, but wound up staying because she loved it. Beyond providing an opportunity to care of her family, Avila was given opportunities that previously seemed unattainable, like earning college degrees. Having grown up in a “very poor community,” Avila has broken generational curses since enlisting. From earning an associate’s degree to being just two classes away from earning a bachelor’s degree – and with plans to pursue a master’s degree – Avila said the Army gave her a completely different life than what others in her family experienced.

“There’s a lot of possibilities I didn’t see in the civilian sector that I see now,” Avila said. “I found strength, I found things I could do stuff that I never thought I could do, and I found my purpose in being part of something bigger than myself.”

When she isn’t pouring herself into Soldier-trainees or herself, Avila spends much of her time living the Army Values out in the community. One recent example is her response to a need for volunteers at a Special Olympics event hosted at a local high school. When Avila heard a woman from her church say she was unsure of how they were going to pull off the event, Avila offered assistance by coordinating a group of volunteers to help. Giving back to her community and being a role model is important to her.

“We aren’t only here at Fort Gordon serving, but we are here for the community ... we live out in the community, and being a role model for those children is important to me,” she said.

Even more important is the impact Avila has on her own children’s lives – especially that of her daughters, who are 12 and almost 14 years old.

“Women can do anything they put their mind to, so having that confidence and strength ... I want them to believe that they can do anything.”



*Sgt. 1st Class Virginia Avila, second from left, poses for a family photograph. (Courtesy photo)*

Anything includes joining the military if they choose.

“I think that’s something a lot of women feel like they have to choose between, and I’m doing both,” she said. “There are some sacrifices here and there, but they can do both.”

As for Avila’s stepson, he is currently stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, serving overseas on a special assignment. And despite him having more time in service, Avila outranks him.

“He outranked me for like three months and I was pretty mad about it,” she laughed. “He hasn’t outranked me since I was promoted to sergeant.”

And she plans to keep it that way.

“One day he’ll salute me,” she said smiling. “I love signal, I love the signal community ... I don’t see leaving it.”